

**THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH REHABILITATION SERVICES
(DYRS)**



Public Safety Outcomes among DYRS Youth

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Prepared by the DYRS Research and Quality Assurance Division

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Introduction

This report focuses on re-conviction rates for juveniles committed to the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) in the District of Columbia. The report examines youth newly committed to DYRS in fiscal years 2004, 2006, and 2007. FY 2004 predates the establishment of DYRS as a cabinet level agency as well as the current administration, which was appointed in January 2005, so the findings best represent the “before” picture of DYRS in this area. DYRS began implementing major reforms to all aspects of the agency in 2005. The report examines new commitments in FY2006 and FY2007 because they represent the fiscal years in which the reforms were being initiated and becoming more institutionalized into policy and practice.

Defining Recidivism:

A committed youth has recidivated if he or she is convicted in Washington, D.C. of a new juvenile or adult offense which occurred within one year of being placed in or returned to the community.

Before presenting recidivism rates, it is necessary to explain exactly how DYRS defines and measures recidivism and the rationale used to define recidivism in this way.

Recidivism is a key indicator¹ for determining whether or not juvenile justice interventions are making a difference in preventing youth from committing additional crimes. However, significant differences occur in how recidivism is defined and measured over time across jurisdictions and within jurisdictions. While there is no one standard definition of recidivism or way of measuring it, the three most common measures include:

- Re-arrest – being charged with a new offense.
- Reconviction – being found involved (guilty) in a new offense in a court of law.
- Re-incarceration – being sentenced to a secure facility after being found guilty of a new offense or because of a violation of community release provisions.

All measures of “recidivism” have advantages and disadvantages. Although re-arrest is an important measure of re-offending because it represents the initial contact with the criminal justice system, the measure is limited because re-arrest can measure policing priorities and juveniles may be arrested for offenses they did not actually commit. Re-incarceration, on the other hand, is a much narrower measure of recidivism and also has limited utility because in some jurisdictions it may be more of a measure of sentencing practices than youth behavior. DYRS chose to use reconviction because a court of law has determined that a juvenile committed the crime giving us higher confidence that we are measuring a youth’s actual behavior, rather than just whether he or she was arrested or not.

¹ Recidivism is not the only outcome measure for youth well-being that DYRS will be employing. In future analyses, we anticipate reporting on Positive Youth Development indicators such as education, workforce development and civic engagement.

Methodology

Data on new juvenile and adult offenses for DYRS committed youth was collected from the District's JUSTIS system which pulls data from D.C. Superior Court's Information system, Courtview. After pulling case information from the JUSTIS system one youth record at a time, DYRS staff then entered the information on each youth into DYRS' internal information system, Youth Empowerment System (YES!). Complete data for all youth committed to DYRS during FY2004, FY2006 and FY2007 was entered into the YES! system. This included cataloging all jackets, the individual charges associated with each specific arrest and the outcome of each charge and jacket. Additionally, DYRS verified that the date and length of commitment to DYRS and the placements of each youth were accurately recorded in the YES! system for each youth.

A complete report for all youth committed to DYRS during the study period was then downloaded from the YES! system into Excel for data analysis. In addition to the jacket, charge, commitment and placement data, this extract included basic demographic information – age, race, gender, and address.

This report was then filtered to determine

- a) The most serious offense which led to the commitment of each youth, and
- b) Any additional jackets opened within one year of a committed youth being placed in the community.

DYRS staff decided to focus on the first year after youth had been returned to the community because this timeframe maximized the impact of the commitment on the individual youth's behavior. It is also the time standard used in the majority of juvenile justice recidivism studies (Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, 2005).

Upon reviewing the complete data sample, DYRS staff made two additional determinations: first, placement data was needed for each committed youth in order to identify the time when youth returned to the community. For example, while a particular youth may be committed to DYRS on March 1, 2006, his initial placement is often the Oak Hill Youth Center, which greatly minimizes the risk of re-arrest. As a result, DYRS staff identified the initial placement of each youth after he/she had been committed to DYRS, and also identified the date of release from a particular facility. Placements were aggregated into three types – Oak Hill Youth Center (Secure Confinement), Residential Treatment Center (RTC), and Community placement (Home, Group Home, and other community-based placements). This allows measuring of a one-year period of "time on the street" regardless of the youth's initial placement. Failure to account for the time spent in a secure facility such as Oak Hill or in a RTC would underestimate the re-arrest rate, as the possibility of becoming involved in criminal activity is much greater in a community setting than in a secure setting.

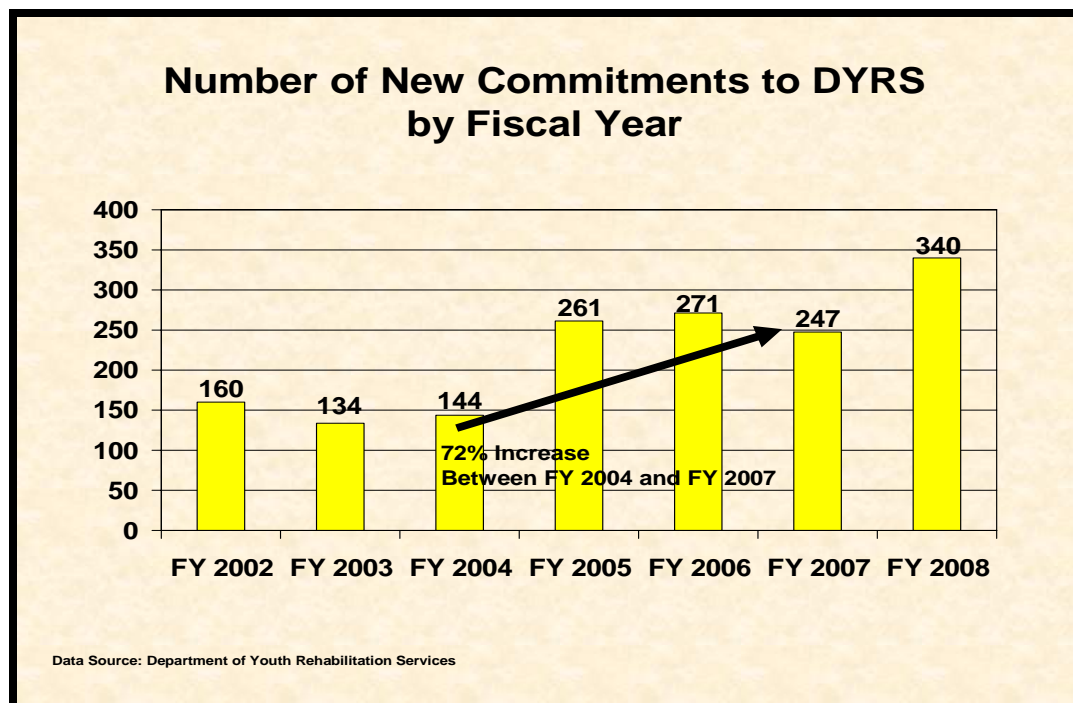
Statistics were run to determine the rate of recidivism for committed youth upon release to the community. Final numbers of reconviction were analyzed in total (all committed youth convicted of a new offense within one year of community placement), as well as by gender, race, age, and placement.

Findings Concerning Commitments and Juvenile Arrests

In order to provide the reader with some context about DYRS and about juvenile crime in the District of Columbia, we begin with a brief look at the change in new commitments to DYRS over the past four fiscal years and corresponding juvenile and adult arrest rates for the same time period. We then discuss specific findings from the recidivism study. The report concludes with an examination of the definitions, methodologies, and recidivism rates in other states for comparison purposes.

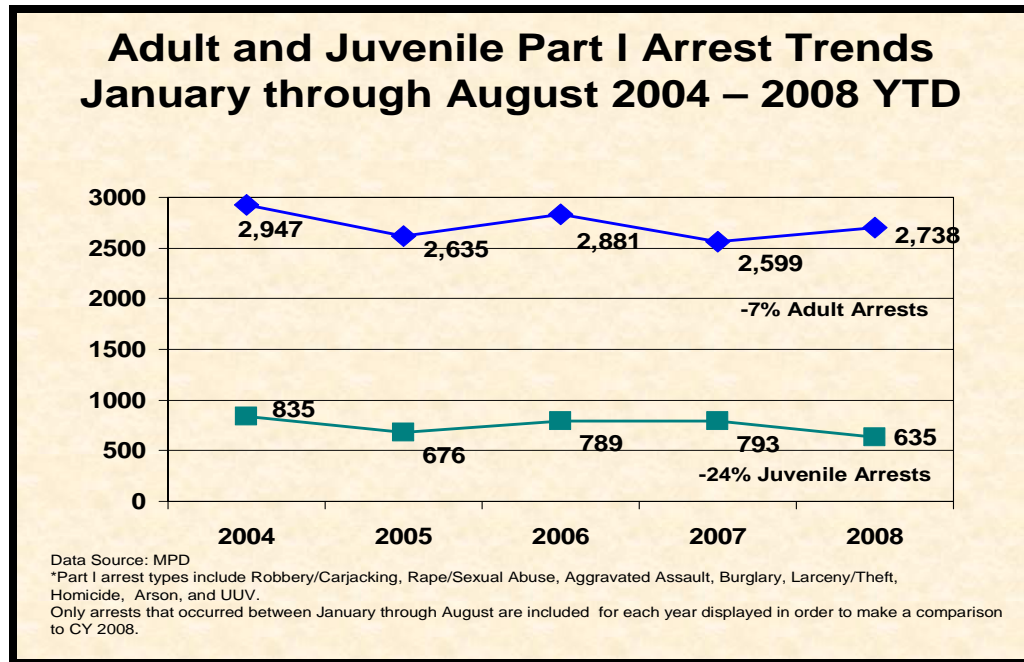
- Today, DYRS serves approximately 650 committed youth. An average of 250 youth are newly committed to DYRS per year, although the actual annual new commitment number has varied substantially from year to year (Figure1). The decision to commit a youth to DYRS jurisdiction is made by a DC Superior Court judge.

Figure 1



- The number of new commitments to DYRS increased 72% between FY 2004 and FY 2007, the dates encompassed by this study. There were 340 new commitments in FY 2008, a 38% increase over FY2007 and a 136% increase since FY 2004.
- This increase in commitments does not appear to be associated with an increase in juvenile crime. Despite the fact that there was a 24% decline in juvenile arrests for Part I offenses from FY2004 to FY2008 (Figure 2), there was a 136% increase in new commitments to DYRS during that time period.

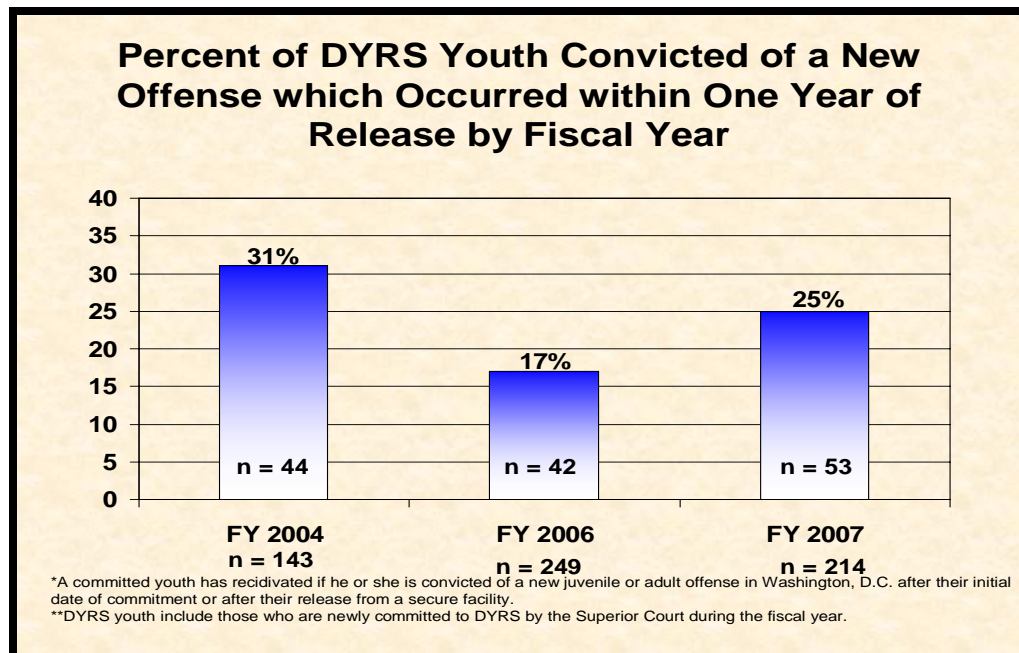
Figure 2



- The overall Part I crime arrest rate for juveniles declined 24% between January 2004 and August of 2008, while only declining 7% for adult arrests during the same time period.

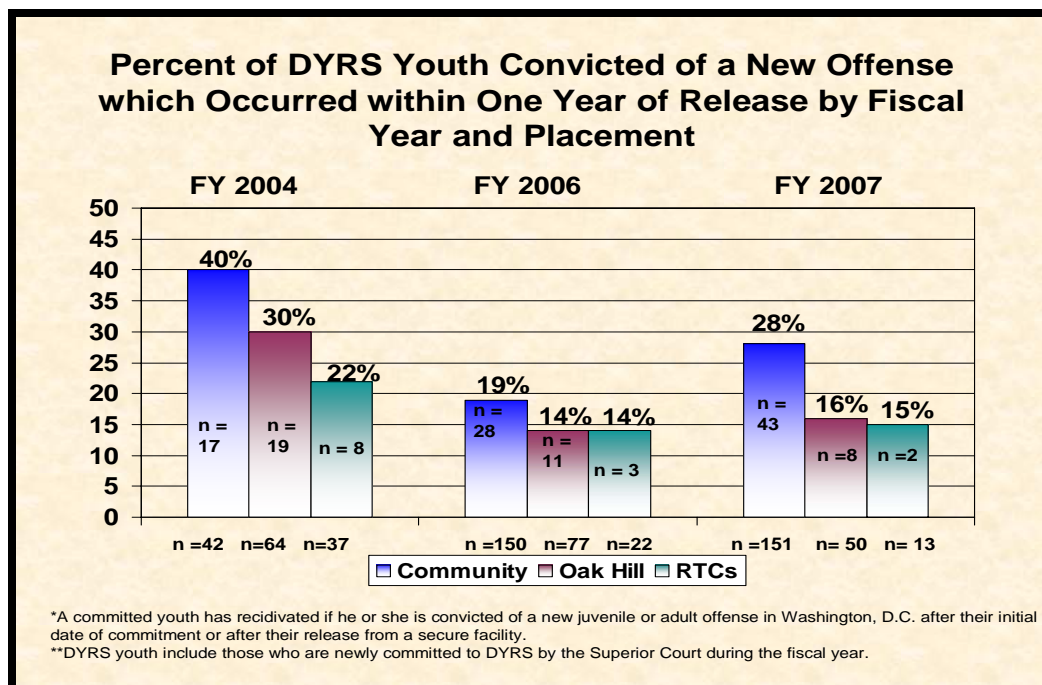
DYRS Recidivism Findings

Figure 3



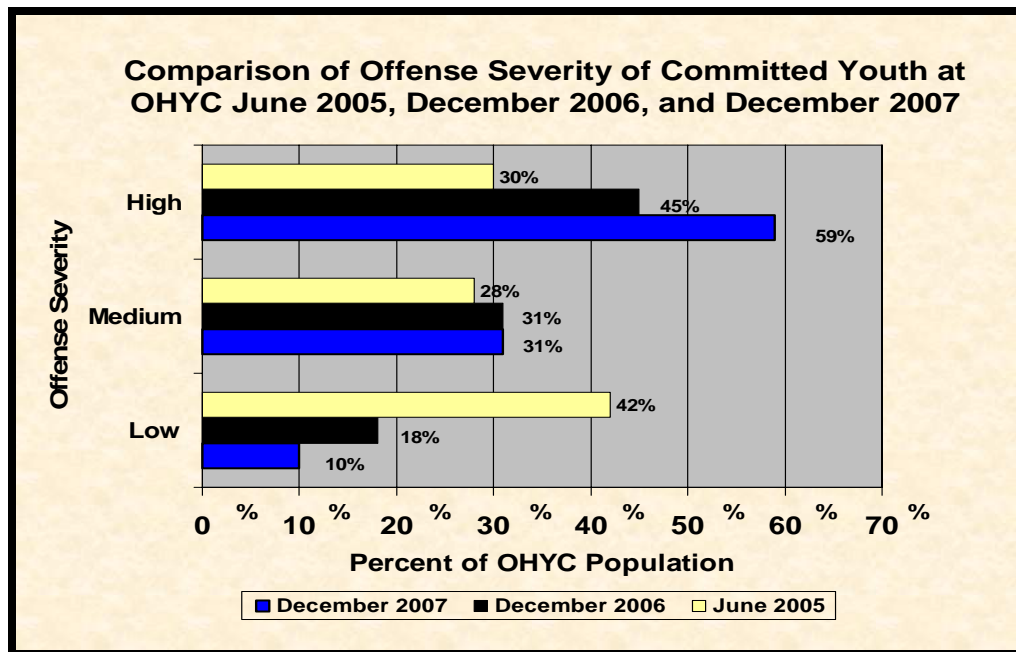
- Recidivism within 12 months of returning to the community for youth newly committed to DYRS, regardless of initial placement, declined substantially -- from 31% in FY 2004 to 25% in FY 2007. The recidivism rate for the FY2006 cohort was the lowest of any year in this study at 18%.

Figure 4



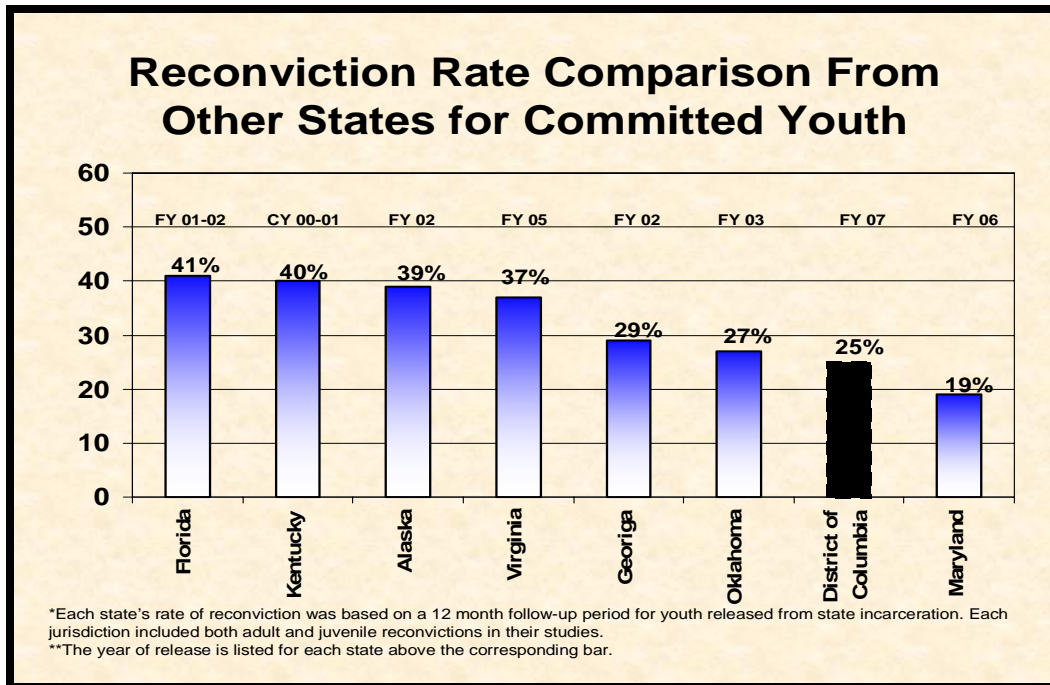
- For recidivism by placement, we also see a substantial decrease in recidivism between FY2004 and subsequent years.
 - For youth released to the community, recidivism decreased 30% between FY 2004 and FY 2007 and was lowest in 2006.
 - For youth released from Oak Hill, the rate of recidivism decreased 47% between FY 2004 and FY 2006 and held steady in FY 2007.
 - For youth released from Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs), the rate of recidivism dropped 42% between FY 2004 and FY 2006 and remained largely unchanged in FY2007.
- DYRS is currently in the process of further disaggregating the data on youth who recidivated to better understand what service and placement types and specific providers had the highest recidivism rates.

Figure 5



- The previous system used by DYRS for placing committed youth was ad hoc, subjective, contingent on the experience and knowledge of the case manager, and lacked organizational support mechanisms. As part of system-wide reform efforts initiated by the new Director, DYRS sought consultation from system stakeholders and outside experts including the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. In contrast to the old system, the Department sought a process that was transparent, predictable, trackable, and open to external review. Additionally, DYRS hoped to increase appropriate and successful placements; reduce institutionalization of delinquent youth without raising risk to public safety; and expedite case processing.
- Above is a chart that compares the offense severity of youth at Oak Hill Youth Center from 2005 through December 2007. The number of youth with more severe offenses in locked custody has increased significantly in order to address public safety concerns. In addition, the length of stay for youth with serious offenses has been significantly increased from an average of 63 days to 9 months.

Figure 6

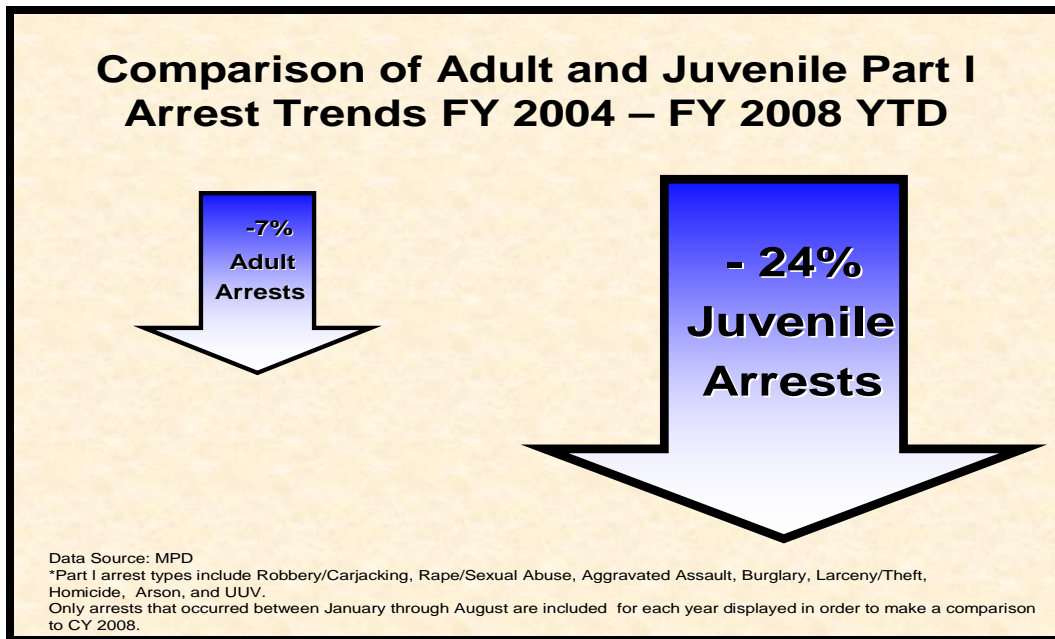


- DYRS' overall rate of recidivism is lower when compared to the most recently published data from other states such as Virginia. This is despite the fact that the number of new commitments to DYRS has increased two and one-half fold between FY2004 and FY2008, putting a strain on agency resources.

Other Indicators

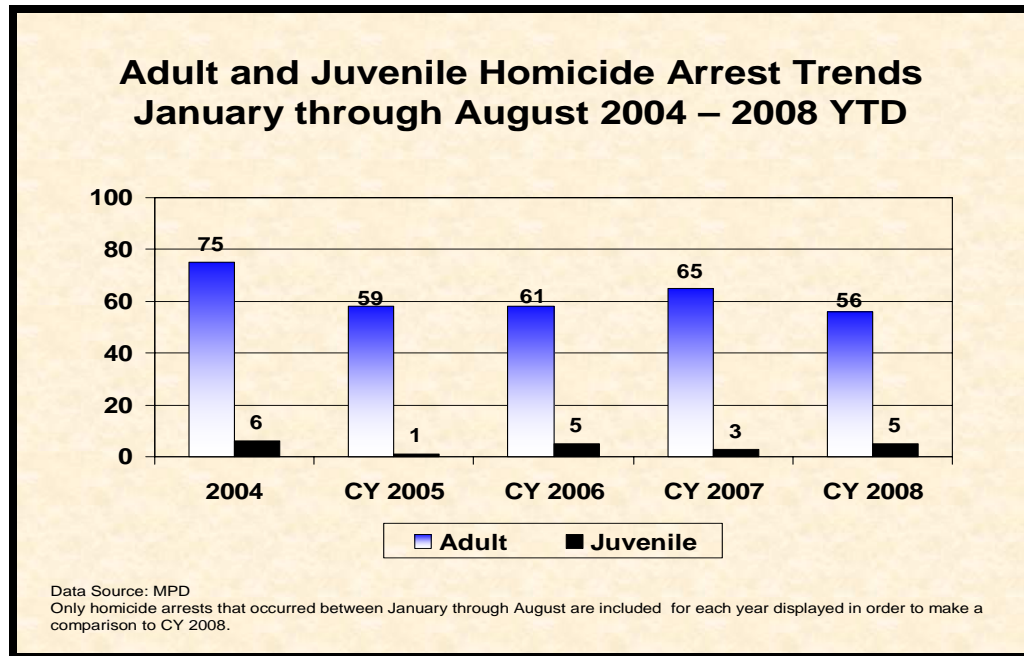
Although recidivism is clearly an important indicator of the juvenile justice system's effectiveness, we examined other data beyond recidivism to gauge the potential public safety impact of DYRS' reform efforts. If, for example, the diminished use of locked custody led other, would-be youthful offenders to commit crimes, DYRS' reforms could negatively impact public safety even if recidivism amongst DYRS youth declined. If DYRS youth came to harm, as evidenced by their being homicide victims, in substantially greater numbers, there would be cause for serious concern. Therefore, as part of this report, DYRS also measured trends in overall arrests for serious crime, arrests for homicide in comparison to adults, and the number of DYRS youth who were victims of homicide.

Figure 7



- Juvenile arrest rates are perhaps the most widely quoted indicator of crime. As mentioned earlier in this report, juvenile arrest rates have been declining in the District since 2004. Overall, District crime data indicates that there has been a substantial decline in serious juvenile arrests between FY 2004 and FY 2008. Further, since 2004, the juvenile arrests for Part I offenses have declined at more than three times the rate of adult arrests for Part I offenses. The fact that arrest rates remain near their lowest-ever levels is good news and serve as an important reminder of the need for the District to continue to develop and support evidence-based responses for court-involved and committed youth.

Figure 8



- From 2004 to 2008, the number of youth arrested for homicides throughout DC (i.e. not just youth under DYRS' supervision) remained in the single digits.
- From FY 2004 to present, there were 32 times as many adults arrested for homicide as there were juveniles.

Figure 9

Number of Youth Committed to DYRS who were Homicide Victims between 2005 and 2008 YTD			
Average daily number of committed youth by year		Number of youth who were homicide victims	Percent of youth who were homicide victims
2005	423	8	1.89%
2006	543	7	1.28%
2007	616	4	0.64%
2008 YTD	679	7	1.03%

- The number and proportion of committed youth who were homicide victims fell between 2005 and 2007, from 8 youth (1.89% of the committed population) in 2005 to 4 youth (.64% of committed population) in 2007. Year to date 2008, there has been a slight increase over 2007 in the number and percentage of youth under DYRS' care who have been homicide victims.

Appendix

The tables in this appendix provide demographic information for committed youth and youth who recidivated following their commitment.

Figure 10

Demographics for All Youth Newly Committed to DYRS by Fiscal Year						
	FY 2004		FY 2006		FY 2007	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Gender						
<i>Male</i>	125	87%	226	91%	188	88%
<i>Female</i>	18	13%	23	9%	26	12%
	143	100%	249	100%	214	100%
Race						
<i>African American</i>	133	93%	240	96%	209	98%
<i>Latino</i>	10	7%	8	3%	5	2%
<i>Asian</i>	---	---	1	0.4%	---	---
	143	100%	249	100%	214	100%
Age						
<i>15 or younger</i>	30	21%	67	27%	58	27%
<i>16</i>	28	20%	75	30%	59	28%
<i>17</i>	43	30%	67	27%	52	24%
<i>18 or older</i>	42	29%	40	16%	45	21%
	143	100%	249	100%	214	100%
Mean Age						
	17 yrs	---	17 yrs		17 yrs	---

Figure 11

Demographics for All Youth Committed to DYRS Convicted of a New Offense within One Year of Release by Fiscal Year						
	FY 2004		FY 2006		FY 2007	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Gender						
<i>Male</i>	44	98%	43	98%	47	89%
<i>Female</i>	1	2%	1	2%	6	11%
	45	100%	44	100%	53	100%
Race						
<i>African American</i>	42	93%	42	95%	51	96%
<i>Latino</i>	3	7%	2	5%	2	4%
	45	100%	44	100%	53	100%
Age						
<i>15 or less</i>	6	13%	13	29%	10	19%
<i>16</i>	7	16%	19	42%	19	36%
<i>17</i>	9	20%	8	18%	13	25%
<i>18 or older</i>	23	51%	5	11%	11	21%
	45	100%	45	100%	53	100%
Mean Age						
	18 yrs	---	18 yrs	---	17 yrs	---

- The demographics among each fiscal year cohort committed to DYRS and those who were re-convicted were almost identical. The youth were predominantly made up of African-American males who had an average age of 17 years. It is worth noting that 100% of youth committed in the District of Columbia are youth of color, almost exclusively African-American males. This is a disturbing trend that deserves further investigation within the different decision-points in the juvenile justice process, a process that has already begun under the leadership of the District's Family Court.